

Hostage Released!

Goal, Malady, Means

Goal: That the hearer may appreciate more fully what it means to have put on Christ.

Malady: Because of our sinful nature, the Law imprisons us as hostages.

Means: Faith in Christ Jesus is God's gracious gift, given to each of us in Baptism. The Gospel sets the hostages free.

Sermon Outline

Introduction: Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well this morning. Today, we are going to be talking about our sinful nature and how Jesus saves us. There is a story that might help us out. A lamb and its mother passed a pigpen each morning on the way to the pasture. Watching the pigs wallow in the mud seemed like fun. On an especially hot day the lamb asked its mother, "May I jump the fence and wallow in the cool mud?"

She replied, "No." And the lamb asked the next question, "Why not?" The mother just replied, "Sheep do not wallow."

This did not satisfy the lamb. He felt his mother had no reason to refuse. As soon as she was out of sight, the lamb ran to the pigpen and jumped the fence. He felt the cool mud on his feet, his legs, and his stomach. After a while he decided he had better go back to his mother, but he could not—he was stuck! His thick wool was weighed down with heavy, sticky mud. His pleasure had become his prison. He was a hostage of the mud. He cried out and the kind farmer, his owner, rescued him. When he was cleansed and returned to the fold, his mother said, "Remember: sheep do not wallow!"

Sin is like that. It looks so inviting, and appears easy to escape from whenever we wish. But it is not so! Pleasure becomes our prison. By nature we are all hostages stuck in the mud! How does Jesus save us? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

1. Who was I before faith came? Much like that lamb stuck in the mud!
 - A. The Bible says, "I, like everyone else, was a prisoner of sin."

- (1) Being a prisoner of sin is akin to the captivity of Terry Anderson, who was held hostage for 7 years by Shiite Muslims. Physical exercises, mental exercises, and especially spiritual exercises did help him pass the time and retain his sanity.
- (2) Yet such exercises by a hostage do not set him free. Anderson's captors may have been impressed by his regimen, but they continued to hold him prisoner. Likewise, rescue from being a spiritual hostage cannot be obtained through your own works under the Law. It does not matter how good we are, we cannot be perfect. You can be the best son, mother, daughter, or father. You can never talk back or be the best employee your boss has ever saw. Your own efforts may make you feel better, but they will never bring you righteousness or salvation.

B. So what then is the role of the Law? The Law's role is simple.

- (1) The Law's role is that of the ancient custodian who was put in charge of the master's son. The custodian's duty was to superintend the son's conduct, to see that the son traveled safely to and from school, did his chores, obeyed his parents, did his homework, etc.
- (2) Our spiritual custodian, the Law, shows us our need for assistance. It reprimands us and points out our weaknesses, our inability to follow what it demands of us. It shows us our sins, our failures. The Law always accuses. The Law always shows us our imperfections and constantly declares to us exactly how imperfect we really are. It says you are a sinner, time and time again. It prepares us for the Gospel, which alone has the power to set us free.

Illustration: While speaking at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Terry Anderson, the former hostage, said something that we could also apply to God's Law and Gospel. The first part could describe the Law: "I wouldn't want to relive my experience, but I won't forget what it taught me." His next comment could describe the Gospel: "But God comforted me, he did guide me, he did help me find my way past the anger and bitterness so that I can live my life in joy and love. I couldn't have survived without

that Bible and without my faith” (AP, in the 13 March 1994, Grand Island NE *Independent*).

2. By means of the Gospel, we are set free from our hostage captivity.

A. While we cannot save ourselves, God has stepped in and saved us. He has paid the price to redeem us by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ. He has crushed the head of the serpent, broken in the dungeon of darkness and sin, and removed us fully and completely. Through His Holy Spirit, we Christians have become sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus (v 26). This happens in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism (v 27).

- (1) Being a child of God is a privilege and honor. We serve our Lord gladly, not by coercion, but in the freedom of the Gospel. We serve Him out of thanks and gladness for what He has done for us.
- (2) This release from captivity is ours through faith as a gift (Eph 2: 8–9). It is not something that we deserve. It is not something that we have earned. Our release is given to us purely as a gift of grace.
- (3) Our spiritual clothing is the garment of the righteousness woven by Christ in his life, death, and resurrection (v 27). He takes upon Himself our sins and give us His own perfection. When God looks at us, He does not see the stain of our sins. Rather, He sees the precious blood of Christ.

B. Since God views all us baptized Christians as his children—equally, without favoritism—we consider each other as of equal status before God (v 28).

- (1) We view ourselves as we really are. We show no favoritism to wealth, power, status, longevity, or anything else. We treat each other as fellow Christians yoked together. We are those united as one by one Baptism into the one faith in the one Christ.
- (2) Since we belong to Christ, we are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs of God’s ancient promises to bless all nations. We are blessed by God to be a blessing to others.

Conclusion: What lies in your tomorrow? What is there *beyond death*? A sick man turned to his doctor and asked, “Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.” Very quietly the doctor replied, “I know little of what is on the other side of death. But I do know one thing: I know Christ, my Master, is there, and that is enough. And when the door opens for me, I shall pass through with no fear, but with gladness.”

You may have been—or may still be now—“held hostage” in an illness, yearning for the day when healing sets you free. You may have been a captive to a bad habit or addiction and wished for the freedom of recovery. You may have felt like a prisoner trapped in an unpleasant job, an abusive relationship, or some other situation, hoping to be released.

We have been released from the Law and its condemnation of our sin. We are no longer hostages, but sons and daughters of God. And we look forward to the final deliverance, when all the bonds of this life will be opened and we will enter the freedom of eternal life.

The Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.